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Teaching Writing to Children and Adolescents

Position Paper

The Importance of Digital Literacy in the 21st Century Classroom

With the mass influx of new technologies on the market, it is becoming increasingly important for educators to be well versed in all types of technologies and the media that are associated with them. Students are at a great advantage because these new technologies are taking learning to places the forefathers of education never dreamed of and educators can access people and places that the students never dreamed of. Students, however, are just that, students and they are also learning what it means to be digitally responsible and to be productive members of a community that includes people from all over the world and from different cultural backgrounds. It is the responsibility of the educators to show students this amazing digital world, but to also provide guidance on being a quality member of this growing and changing digital society.

One aspect of digital life that is of great importance to students and teachers is the amount of information that can be found on the Internet and the tools we can use to gather that information in one place. Educators must teach students how to view this information with a critical eye, but this first requires that teachers themselves understand what is acceptable and then demonstrating and guiding students toward quality information. One example of this is a site dedicated to keeping people from the peril of an element call “dihydrogen monoxide.” On the surface the [website](http://www.dhmo.org) appears to be legitimate. It provides information about research, provides an address where the facilities can be found, and contains some government backing, but on closer inspection the trained eye would realize that what the site is claiming is so far fetched and outlandish that it can not possible be true. For students, who are not trained however, this site would be a great source for a paper on environmental issues. “Dihydrogen monoxide” is what most people call H2O or water and this website discusses the harmful effects of it and why it should be avoided. It’s a hoax, but before it was seen for what it truly is, many people were persuaded into believing the claims were valid. In the statement by the IRA they make it clear that “providing instruction in how to critically evaluate the relevancy, accuracy, reliability, and perspective of information” is of the utmost importance. Educators must regularly seek out information for their students as well as guidance for assignments that call for the retrieval of information. When used correctly digital resources can provide rich information for students to use and unlike traditional tools such as books, the digital resources are available to anyone with Internet access and can be shared or bookmarked for later reading.

Digitally Literacy is also important for students and educators as a means for assessment and feedback. There are a million assessment tools that teachers can use, but the ones that are most successful are the ones that make assessment personal. These digital assessment and feedback tools also do not take away from classroom instruction. Many educators have turned to using audio comments and screen casting to provide feedback to students across curricula. One math teacher, [Eric Marcos](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8OAfHg0CP4) found screen casting especially useful in the math classroom and the link is to a video where Eric explains how he stumbled upon screen casting and how now his classroom students use the tool to teach each other. Eric is an example of how digital tools, when used correctly can be adopted by students, expanding their learning and understanding beyond where educators ever thought it could go. Sara Bauer discusses in her article, “When I Stopped Writing on Their Papers,” that students “[feel] personally engaged in the process of receiving feedback,” when discussing her choice to move away from the pen and instead use audio comments to give individualized feedback to her students. She goes on to discuss how using the audio comments help her “target…instruction so that students [can] learn about themselves as writers and develop strategies for avoiding common pitfalls on future assignments.” There is a reassurance for students when they can hear their instructors voice guiding them through a learning process or providing feedback about an already created assignment. Especially when giving critique, the benefits from hearing the voice of their teacher and hearing that the comments are from a place of concern and care, the students are more open to making the changes and hearing what the teacher has to say. And because these digital tools can be used to record instruction and comments, they can be saved and used as evidence for student growth or given to other students with similar difficulties.

Although technology and digital literacy put students at a great advantage, it is up to the teacher to decide where and when to use such technologies. Students must also be sufficiently trained in out to use the technology to support students without it interfering with the learning process. This requires that educators by trained and have time to use the technology for some time before turn keying it to the students. Although students are more technologically savvy, they are not accustomed to using technology for formal or even educational purposes. Along with the curriculum, proper use of the technology that will be used as support should be properly presented to the student and they should have time to “play” with it before any type of assessment takes place. Teachers must also decide, according to an article by the NAEYC when instruction can be “effectively achieved using traditional classroom materials, or whether the use of particular technology and interactive media tools [can] actually [extend] the opportunities for learning and development.” Teachers should not be using digital tools just because they exist. The tools should be used to extend traditional learning or be implemented in a way that might replace traditional educational tools without interfering with instruction.

It is so important that teachers are providing the best education possible for their students and preparing them for the future. Digital literacy is especially important because it is becoming increasingly dominant in classrooms and the workplace. Being able to access quality information online for support during research is one tool that students will need in all aspects of their daily lives. Using digital tools to receive feedback and instruction and then being able to use those tools to become the teacher to fellow classmates are skills that will be valuable to them in all their classes and as they make their way in the world. Providing proper instruction is the educator’s main goal so these skills are developed properly, but not relying solely on technology also creates versatile learners who will be able to function even when technology is absent from learning and in life.

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